



File Code: 1950

Date: February 14, 2003

Planning Participant,

The intent of this letter is to inform you that the Forest Service, Custer National Forest, Sioux Ranger District has completed an environmental assessment (EA) for the **Kraft Springs Fire Hazard Abatement and Restoration Project**. A completed EA document is enclosed for your review and comment. The project area is primarily in Carter County, Montana, with a small portion in Harding County, South Dakota.

The Responsible Official for this project is the Forest Supervisor, Nancy T. Curriden. Based on the analysis presented in the EA, I am recommending that the Forest Supervisor consider choosing Alternative 2, the Proposed Action, for implementation. Alternative 2 would treat approximately 16,050 acres of stands burned by moderate and high intensity fire in the Long Pines Land Unit during the 2002 Kraft Springs Fire. The initial management objectives are to reduce hazardous fuels in the form of dead and dying trees, provide for reforestation of forested lands, recover the economic value of the dead and dying trees, and to restore and stabilize the existing road system. All management tools, including salvage of merchantable material, cutting, piling, and burning of non-merchantable material were considered in the development of the proposed action. Commercial salvage would use only ground-based tractor yarding. Temporary roads would be used to access the commercial salvage units, and those temporary roads would be decommissioned after treatment activities. No new specified road construction would be needed. Road improvement would occur on main system roads in the Long Pines Land Unit.

Background. The Kraft Springs Project is within the Long Pines Land Unit. The entire Long Pines Land Unit is approximately 70,000 acres and is one of eight forested land units that make up the Sioux Ranger District. In August-September 2002, the Kraft Springs wildfire burned approximately 43,300 acres in the Long Pines Land Unit. A previous scoping letter dated October 29, 2002 notified the public that the Sioux Ranger District was considering developing a specific fire hazard abatement and restoration project in the area of the Long Pines Land Unit affected by the Kraft Springs Fire.

The Environmental Assessment considered three alternatives: No Action Alternative, the Proposed Action Alternative #2, and Alternative #3. Alternatives 2 and 3 propose various types of fuel reduction treatments, tree planting, and road improvement.

Public Involvement.

Written comments on this EA or exemption are solicited from you and other reviewers. The Responsible Official (Custer National Forest Supervisor) will consider all public comments before making a decision. In submitting written comments, please provide specific facts along with supporting reasons that you believe should be considered by the Deciding Official in reaching a decision. In order to retain your administrative appeal rights, you must provide written comments during this 30-day comment period. A legal notice will be published in the newspaper of record (Billings Gazette, Billings, MT.), and the comment period will start on that date (estimated publication date of Legal Notice is February 14, 2003) and end 30 days later.



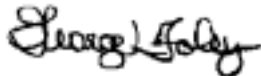
The Sioux Ranger District will be requesting a Chief's Emergency Situation Determination (36 CFR 215.10(d)) for an emergency situation caused by the September-August Kraft Springs Fire. This request applies to about 6,300 acres of the Kraft Springs Fire Hazard Abatement and Restoration project. If an exemption is approved, the decision on Kraft Springs remains appealable. The exemption allows implementation of the project during the 45-day appeal filing period, the up-to-45-day appeal review period, and the 15-day stay after disposition of the last appeal.

Your comments must be postmarked by the end of the 30-day comment period. Comments received in response to this solicitation, including names and addresses of those who comment, will be considered part of the public record on this EA and will be available for public inspection. Send your written comments to:

**George Foley
District Ranger
Kraft Springs Project
Sioux Ranger District
P.O. Box 37
Camp Crook, SD. 57724**

A complete EA with color maps showing the alternatives and activities proposed are also available for viewing and downloading on the Custer NF website at: <http://www.fs.fed.us/r1/custer/>. For additional information contact John Clark at 605-797-4432 or by email to John Clark at: jrclark@fs.fed.us.

Sincerely,



GEORGE FOLEY
District Ranger